

VZCZCXR05070

PP RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH RUEHTRO
DE RUEHGO #0222/01 1000409
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 100409Z APR 09
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8868
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1896
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5374
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8967
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6543
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 4372
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2361
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000222

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP AND IO; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/09/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: KACHIN NLD DISCUSSES U.S. POLICY; ELECTIONS

Classified By: Poloff Chelsia C. Wheeler for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Charge Dinger and poloff traveled to Kachin State in Burma's far north April 3-7 to take the political temperature and observe an embassy small-grant environmental project. Police Special Branch (SB) attention made political discussions difficult, though brave National League for Democracy (NLD) officials agreed to meet. The Kachin NLD thinks U.S.-Government of Burma (GOB) engagement is "an excellent idea," and the primary goals should be the release all political prisoners and the commencement of talks among the GOB, NLD, and ethnic groups. On the 2010 elections, the Kachin NLD awaits promulgation of the rules, but expects the regime effectively to bar NLD participation. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) During an April 3-7 trip to Kachin State, Charge and poloff first traveled to Indawgyi Lake, Burma's largest lake in Kachin's southwest, to observe an embassy-funded small-grant project that is encouraging a Burmese environmental NGO to work with village committees to establish "no fishing" zones. Fish stocks have declined noticeably in recent years, endangering the local villages' protein supply and potentially creating problems for migratory birds.

Police oversight

¶3. (C) As mandated by GOB regulation, the embassy sought and received permission for the Indawgyi visit. Since there are only two flights a week, the intent was to schedule meetings in Mitkyina, Kachin's capital, as well. The military regional commander, who some describe as the de-facto governor of Kachin State, declined to meet. Several political contacts expressed interest in meeting, until it became obvious that an SB contingent was keeping a close eye on the Charge's every move. Representatives of Kachin youth groups and the Kachin Independence Organization then bowed off, offering instead to get together sometime later in Rangoon. Only the NLD dared to meet. One of its leaders, Daw Ngwe Kyaing, said simply: "What more can they do to us?" She invited us to her home where two other NLD members and her husband were also present. All four have been detained

in the past for periods of several months. When an SB officer sauntered in to listen to the conversation, we asked him to wait outside and he complied.

The Kachin NLD

14. (C) Daw Ngwe Kyaing said the Kachin NLD consists of 76 members. Most are male and two are "youths". (Note: The NLD defines youth as anyone under the age of 55. End Note.) Top members of the Kachin NLD, all of whom have been political detainees at some point, currently are able to travel to Rangoon occasionally to observe major political anniversaries and to coordinate policy with headquarters. At times in the past, the regime has denied travel permission. Still, Daw Ngwe Kyaing indicated that SB harassment at present "is the worst it has ever been." Every time she leaves the house she is photographed and followed.

U.S. Engagement an "Excellent Idea"

15. (C) The group was aware of the ongoing Burma-policy review in Washington. Asked about the possibility of the USG increasing engagement with the regime, the NLD members said "that is an excellent idea." Asked what the main goals should be, from their perspective, they listed two: the release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners, and the start of a tripartite dialogue among the NLD, all ethnic groups, and the GOB.

RANGOON 00000222 002 OF 002

2010 Elections

16. (C) Daw Ngwe Kyaing said the Kachin NLD is doing very little to prepare for the 2010 elections. Since the GOB has yet to release the election law, it is impossible to prepare.

The Kachin NLD expects, though, that the regime will not allow the NLD to participate. Daw Ngwe Kyaing said that is exactly what happened during the May 2008 referendum for a new constitution. Kachin NLD members were not allowed to cast ballots. U Kyin Thein, another member of the group, claimed with confidence that, despite the NLD's challenges, Aung San Suu Kyi still enjoys broad support in Kachin State. When she visited there in 2003 prior to her latest house arrest, the streets were filled with joyful supporters.

Comment

17. (C) The visit to Kachin State accented how difficult it is for "dissident" elements to organize and operate in today's Burma. The SB is watching. Even around remote Indawgyi Lake, SB personnel entered each village ahead of the Charge and party to put a damper on any possible discussion opportunity. Still, brave activists persevere, often at their, and their families', peril. We made sure each potential interlocutor was aware the SB was observing. While Daw Ngwe Khaing and her colleagues accepted the risk, even with twinkles in their eyes, it was obvious Daw Ngwe Khaing's middle-aged daughter was distraught. It is an ongoing challenge to expand the embassy's regional contact base. In recent months, the GOB has been relatively generous in granting Mission personnel permission to travel outside designated tourist areas, but the constant SB presence is the downside.

18. (C) Still, when a meeting does occur it can be valuable, as was the case with the Kachin NLD reps. They had previously heard of Secretary Clinton's announcement of the Burma review in Jakarta, and they are hoping that somehow the USG can help move Burma politics forward. Clearly, though, the Kachin NLD view is that the goals of releasing political prisoners and encouraging dialogue between the regime and its

opponents are essential steps in any engagement.
DINGER